11. User Support Resources

11.1 Context-Sensitive Help

Context-sensitive help provides a brief explanation about an object and how to use it. The application provides this form of help for each object with which users can interact. If an object is temporarily grayed out or disabled, the explanation identifies why the object is not available.

Instant help. F1 (and HELP in Motif) displays context-sensitive help for the object that has input focus in a window. The help information can be provided in the status bar (if one is present) or in a separate pop-up window displayed at the pointer location. If none of the objects in a window has focus when users press one of these keys, a Help window is displayed (see section 11.2) or browser-based application help is activated (see section 11.3).

Help mode. Access to context-sensitive help is also available by invoking Help mode.

Motif Only. Users invoke this mode by activating the On Item option in the Help menu.

MS Windows Only: Users invoke this mode by activating the What's This? button on a toolbar, the What's This? button in a dialog window, or the What's This? option in the pop-up menu for the object.

When this mode is invoked, the pointer changes to a "help" shape. Users then place the pointer on an object and click BLeft to display help information for the object. The information is provided in the status bar or in a separate pop-up window. Help mode is exited and the pointer returns to its normal shape when the information is displayed. SHIFT+F1 (and SHIFT+HELP in Motif) invokes Help mode from the keyboard. ESC or clicking outside the window exits Help mode and returns the pointer to its normal shape.

Tooltip help (MS Windows Only). A tooltip is a small pop-up window that displays the name of an object when the object has no text label (e.g., a toolbar button with a graphic label). The window is displayed near the pointer when it has been placed on an object for about one second, and is dismissed when users click on the object or move the pointer off it.

11.2 Window Help

Window help provides an overview of the function(s) performed in a window. Application windows that support this form of help include a Help push button in the action area.[1] Activating this button either opens a Help dialog window (as described here) or launches browser-based application help (see section 11.3). The Help push button is grayed out and unavailable for selection if help is not available; an empty window (or one indicating that no help is available) is not displayed.

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[1] Previous versions of these specifications called for window help to be available for each window in an application. Motif recommends that this form of help be provided for each application window, while MS Windows considers it to be optional and not to be used as a substitute for context-sensitive help.

A Help window, shown in figure 11-1, describes the set of actions that users can perform in a window. The title of the window includes the name of the application window to which it relates (e.g., "Help on WindowName"). The window is large enough to display at least ten lines of text and wide enough to display its contents without scrolling horizontally. The window contains an OK push button and may include Previous and Next buttons if the information can be viewed in page increments and a More button if users can access other help information from the window (e.g., launch application-level help). OK is the default action in the window.
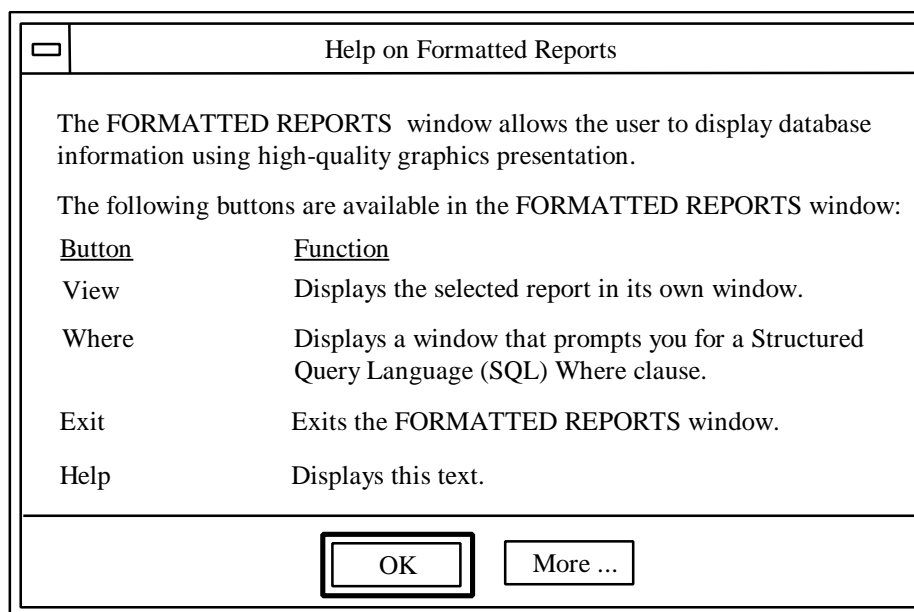

Help on Formatted Reports

The FORMATTED REPORTS window allows the user to display database information using high-quality graphics presentation.

The following buttons are available in the FORMATTED REPORTS window:

Button	Function
View	Displays the selected report in its own window.
Where	Displays a window that prompts you for a Structured Query Language (SQL) Where clause.
Exit	Exits the FORMATTED REPORTS window.
Help	Displays this text.

[OK]   [More ...]

Figure 11-1. Example Help window in Motif.

11.3 Application Help

Application help provides online documentation about the features of an application and may also include information on how to perform tasks using the application.

Users access application help from the On AppName option in the Help menu for windows with a menu bar. If the application is composed of multiple segments, users access help information from an On SegName option for each segment in the application. In either case, activating the menu option launches a Web browser and displays the Help home page for the application or segment.[2] If the application is constructed so that its component segments can be loaded or not as the system administrator sees fit, the help information is similarly subdivided so that it is not offered to users unless it is both appropriate and available. As indicated above, application help can also be accessed from windows with a Help push button (in lieu of displaying a Help

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[2] Both CDE and MS Windows provide a system-level help manager or browser from which to access application help for COTS software. The specifications presented here support a more rudimentary capability that allows users to access help documentation for DoD-developed applications and/or segments using the browser provided by the COE.

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window). Activating this button launches the browser and displays help information about the window containing the button.

If the browser is already open, requesting help for a different window in the application opens a new browser window, rather than launching another version of the browser with the new information. A new browser window is opened whether help is accessed from the menu bar or a Help push button and whether help is provided for the application as a whole or separately for each of its component segments.

When the browser is launched, the window for which application help was requested remains open. Moving input focus to a different application window, closing the window from which help was requested, or exiting the application does not change the help information displayed by the browser. Explicit user action (e.g., requesting help for another application window, selecting a link in the browser window) is required for the browser to navigate to other help information. Exiting the application does not automatically exit the browser; users have to exit the browser in order to quit application help.

Basic browser features such as bidirectional tracking, history lists, bookmarks, and hyperlinks are available to users for locating, viewing, and marking specific help content. However, because an application may be composed of multiple segments, the help pages for individual segments are designed so that they contain links only to other pages within the segment and not to pages in other segments (since there is no certainty that they will be part of the application). Users navigate to help information about other segments in the application by selecting the appropriate On SegName option from the Help menu or by entering the URL for the segment in the browser window if they know it.

At a minimum, application help includes an online version of the user's manual for the application or segment. Users view this information when they activate the On AppName or On SegName options in the Help menu. If desired, the application can also provide procedure-related information with instructions on how to perform tasks, and computer-based training and tutorials for learning to use the application. This information is packaged as separate help documents and accessed from application-specific options in the Help menu.

Application help documents are developed using the version of HTML supported by the COE (see section 1.3). These documents comply with specifications on page design and information presentation in Web applications in sections 13 and 14. The title of the help document is "Help on AppName" or "Help on SegName." The title is displayed in the title bar of the browser window when users access the Help home page. Subordinate navigation and information pages include the document title and the name of the help topic addressed on the page.

The Help home page provides an overview of the help topics addressed by the application or segment. When reference information is presented, the topics are ordered as they occur in the application. For example, information about the contents of a menu would list the menu options in the order they appear in the menu. When task-oriented information is presented, topic order follows the sequence of steps for carrying out the task. Depending on the number of help topics addressed, the home page can include an index of topics or provide a link to a separate index

page. The home page may also provide access to a search engine for doing keyword searches to locate specific help information. If desired, frames can be used to define navigation and information areas so that users can view help topics and information in the same browser window.

11.4 System Help

System help is available from the CDE or MS Windows desktop and includes tutorials, user documentation, job planning aids, and computer-based training modules. The application does not integrate its help information into these system-level help resources; application help is available from within the application as defined in section 11.3.